

4/09/2007 This Week in Congress

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April 9, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you and your family had a nice Easter.

Studying Hunger and Human Rights Issues in Darfur

In my role as co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I accompanied House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland to the African country of Sudan this week to see firsthand the ongoing crisis in the Darfur region and meet with government officials and humanitarian leaders. The crisis began in February 2003 when two groups emerged to challenge the Sudanese governments' treatment of certain tribes in Darfur. The conflict escalated when the government of Sudan and its allied militia - the Janjaweed - began a campaign of terror against civilians to stop the movement.

Nearly half a million people have been killed throughout the course of this conflict. Villages are being attacked and crops destroyed. Another two million people have been displaced from their homes within Darfur and hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee into the neighboring country of Chad. Refugees are suffering from severe malnourishment and disease and are dependent on relief organizations until the violence comes to an end.

In Sudan, we met with government officials, including Mohamed Yousuf Kebir, the Governor of North Darfur, and Major General Luke Aprezi, African Union Mission in Sudan Force Commander, to discuss ways to end the conflict in Darfur and the urgent need to allow United Nations peacekeepers into Sudan. We toured the Alsalam Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp where 47,000 refugees live in crowded, deplorable conditions. We were also briefed on the efforts of organizations taking part in the humanitarian mission in Darfur, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Feed the Children and Catholic Charities. The groups have come under attack and been forced to limit their operations.

In a world where we have an abundance of food, we cannot let anything - including a country's government - get between a hungry child and food. No political struggle should cause the people of a nation to struggle for survival.

Visiting Wounded American Soldiers in Germany

After Sudan, I traveled to Germany where I visited wounded American soldiers at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. Landstuhl Regional Medical Center is the largest American military hospital outside of the United States and serves as the primary medical treatment center for those injured in U.S. operations within Europe, Southwest Asia and the Middle East. While there, I had the opportunity to see Sergeant Michael Andersen with the 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley and Specialist Rustin R. Bird who was born in Liberal and has family in the Liberal area.

The recent revelations of conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. have raised concerns about our nation's commitment to care for injured service members. This visit allowed me to meet directly with our service men and women and learn about the challenges they face. These heroes deserve the best care and treatment available and we must make sure they are receiving it in all parts of the world.

County Farm Service Agency Offices Come Together

Last Tuesday, representatives from the counties affected by the proposed Farm Service Agency (FSA) office closures met in Salina to develop a unified counter proposal. I am pleased to see these counties come together to develop a plan. The group agreed to move forward with the development of a counter proposal plan to save FSA money while maintaining existing offices. The group of representatives will be traveling to Washington, D.C. later this month to unveil the formal proposal.

I am opposed to the closing of these FSA offices in Kansas because it appears this plan is not about saving money. FSA has not provided adequate assurance that the closures will result in better services for producers or be a significant savings of taxpayer money. Furthermore, it remains a premature decision to close offices before Congress writes the 2007 Farm Bill, which will happen in the coming months.

Announcing the Final Stops of my First District Listening Tour

I will conclude my eleventh annual First District Listening Tour this week with visits to Finney, Stevens, Grant and Kearny Counties. On Tuesday, April 10, I will be in Garden City. On Wednesday, April 11, I will visit Moscow, Ulysses and Lakin. [Click here to view times and locations for each community visit.](#)

In the Office

Phil Sechtem of Fort Hays State University was in this week with the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association to talk about legislation that would allow speech-language pathologists to enroll in the Medicare Part B program.

Several Kansans were in my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Clayton and Sue Anderson and Brad Berroth of Alma, Matt Kaiser of Inman, and Tadgh Davis and Denise Guttery, originally of Osborne. Principal Hirotaka Bralley of Enterprise also brought several students from Enterprise Academy by for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry